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Economic and Social Council

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Organizational session for 2012

Provisional summary record of the 1st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 10 January 2012, at 3 p.m.

Temporary President: Mr. Kapambwe ..... (Zambia)
President: Mr. Koterec ..... (Slovakia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Temporary President** declared open the organizational session for 2012 of the Economic and Social Council.

Statement by the Temporary President

2. **The Temporary President** said that in 2011, the world had witnessed mass uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East; an earthquake and tsunami in Japan that had killed 19,000 people and exposed the country to a nuclear meltdown; the destabilization of European markets caused by a still unfolding debt crisis; a major drought in the Horn of Africa affecting millions of people; and social unrest throughout the globe. In that year of turbulence, the Council's mandate to serve as the forum for addressing social, economic and financial issues had become more vital than ever.

3. Education — the key to self-employment — had been a fitting theme for the high-level segment of the Council's substantive session of 2011, which had drawn together prominent statesmen, including former British prime minister Gordon Brown, and a record 1,400 representatives of the private sector and civil society. Delegations had adopted an ambitious ministerial declaration that sought to improve access to and the quality of education for millions of children and adults.

4. The 2011 substantive session had also included a coordination segment that had articulated ways of strengthening the role of the United Nations in global economic governance, an operational activities segment that had paved the way for the upcoming quadrennial comprehensive policy review of the General Assembly, a humanitarian affairs segment that had sounded the alarm on the food crisis in the Horn of Africa and the challenges facing the recently established State of South Sudan, and a general segment that had improved ties between the Council and the Peacebuilding Commission. In addition, the Council's Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti had kept a spotlight on that earthquake-ravaged country.

5. In 2011, the Council had also held meetings with many of the United Nations agencies headquartered in Geneva in order to explore ways to strengthen their relationships with the Council. Other highlights of its work had included a joint meeting with the Peacebuilding Commission on South Sudan, two joint meetings with the Second Committee on job creation and the economic and financial crises, a joint meeting with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the International Telecommunications Union on cybersecurity and development and extensive dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions throughout the year.

6. Despite its accomplishments, in order to assume a prominent role on the world stage, the Council must remain relevant. In 2011, it had improved its online presence by holding a web-based forum on education challenges, conducting social media campaigns and producing an e-book on its work. He introduced the e-book with a short video prepared by the Department of Public Information and the Department for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Management, noting that the Secretariat was taking the "paper-smart" approach advocated by the Secretary-General.

7. The Council should become a strong, respected and recognizable brand. The "ECOSOC Conversations with Nobel Laureates" series, inspired by its November 2011 discussion with Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, was an important step towards that goal. The series should cover the entire spectrum of issues under the Council's mandate; for example, discussions could be held with the three eminent women leaders who had won the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize — perhaps as a joint event with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) — or with Nobel laureates in medicine, who could discuss the diseases of the future. In addition, the success of the events held with the Peacebuilding Commission and the Second Committee in 2011, suggested that the Council should hold more joint events with a range of United Nations bodies, including the Security Council.

8. Small, practical measures could go a long way in raising the Council's visibility. Granting it the same respect as the General Assembly by displaying portraits of its former Presidents near the Council Chamber, granting the President a budget and an appropriate staff, and allowing him to serve on a full-time basis for a year and to wear the special lapel pins worn by the President of the Assembly, as recommended at the retreat of former Council Presidents, would help it to fulfil its mandate. Currently, the Council could not provide effective policy coordination to the large

number of commissions, funds and programmes under its purview, nor could it adequately monitor the implementation of its decisions; consequently, the reports of its subsidiary bodies were given only perfunctory consideration. A full-time President could represent the Council appropriately and keep the world's attention on pressing issues. While he recognized that the proposal had financial implications, especially in the context of the current global financial crisis, the Council risked becoming irrelevant if it did not deliver.

Statement by the Secretary-General of the United Nations

9. The Secretary-General said that the Council would play a key role a number of milestone events in 2012, chief among them the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). Noting that the Council would hold its annual ministerial review and Development Cooperation Forum shortly after that Conference, he urged Council members to make the most of those opportunities.

10. At the 11th meeting of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, he had set out his five-year vision for maintaining solidarity in an era of austerity and uncertainty based on five global imperatives; the Council would be instrumental in fulfilling each of them. First and foremost, in the area of sustainable development, efforts must be intensified in order to meet the 2015 target for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and to ensure a successful outcome at Rio+20; and plans for a post-2015 development agenda, which could include new goals that better integrated the component of sustainability, must be initiated.

11. When he had assumed office five years previously, he had been determined to raise the issue of climate change to the top of the global agenda. Since then, significant progress had been made. Member States should build on the spirit of cooperation displayed in the negotiations on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, culminating in the outcome agreements of the 2011 United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in Durban, to make progress on climate change financing and, in particular, on the new "Sustainable Energy for All" initiative. The Council could promote wider engagement with sustainable development issues at all levels and encourage greater accountability for the commitments made. Its Development Cooperation Forum, in particular, could play a key role as Member States implemented the recommendations of the recent Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness.

12. Prevention of runaway damage from natural disasters was a second area requiring action; the Council's role in deliberating on humanitarian emergencies, as mandated by the General Assembly, was important in fostering and coordinating better risk reduction and disaster preparedness strategies.

13. Building a safer and more secure world was his third imperative. The United Nations had been sorely tested in 2012 as conflict and security situations had flared up around the world, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Afghanistan, South Sudan, the Middle East and Somalia. The Council's role in promoting global dialogue on critical economic and social issues such as decent work, migration and population pressures could help improve safety and security in post-conflict countries.

14. The fourth area of action was support for nations in transition; the Arab Spring had served as a wake-up call in that respect. The United Nations could support the transition from recovery to development by helping to restore justice and strengthen public institutions and services. For its part, the Council could share its experiences in post-conflict peacebuilding and the successes of its ad hoc advisory groups with the Peacebuilding Commission.

15. The fifth imperative in his vision was the empowerment of women and young people. Member States must find new ways to create decent jobs and greater opportunities for women, who were the bedrock of families, communities and societies, and youth, who played a vital role in sustainable development; he was encouraged to note that the Council's annual ministerial review would address that pressing need. He assured the Council that it would have the full support of the Secretariat in its endeavours.

Election of the President

16. **The Temporary President** said that, under rule 18 of the Council's rules of procedure, in 2012 it was the turn of the Group of Eastern European States to nominate a candidate for President. Consequently, he would take it that the Council wished to elect

Mr. Koterec (Slovakia), who had been nominated by the Group, to the post of President.

17. *Mr. Koterec (Slovakia) was elected President by acclamation.*

18. *Mr. Koterec (Slovakia) took the Chair.*

Statement by the President

19. **The President** said that setting the global development agenda was critical in making the Council a truly meaningful organ. A new approach was required, particularly in light of the current economic uncertainty that had made its role even more relevant.

20. The landscape of development cooperation had changed beyond recognition as many countries had experienced economic growth and become ineligible for low-cost loans; two thirds of the world's poorest people now lived in middle-income countries and emerging donors and private sources had become as important to the development assistance framework as many donor Governments. The Council had an opportunity to establish itself as the forum for frank, free-flowing discourse on the issue through its Development Cooperation Forum, which was unburdened by the entrenched power structures of older bodies. While many were dissatisfied with the Forum's infrequent biennial meetings and limited toolkit, those perceived limitations could become strengths if the Council cultivated itself as the place where fresh ideas were incubated, new policies established and global partnerships formed.

21. Many Governments were eager to share their development experiences at the Council's other new forum, the annual ministerial review. Nine countries would make voluntary presentations on the theme of jobs for at the 2012 review, and others would doubtless be interested in the 2013 theme, science, technology and culture. Joint presentations by Governments could enliven the format and stir debate, and the Council could also encourage the participation of academics, foundations and the private sector and revamp the analytical framework of the presentations to enhance their quality and the depth of reporting and analysis.

22. Sustainability and the post-2015 development architecture would be important issues for the Council to consider in 2012. Rio+20 must focus on changing the terms of the debate on sustainable development from neutralizing human influence on the planet to better managing and mitigating its impact. The institutional framework for addressing the many global environmental challenges was largely in place and if the Council were truly empowered, it could become the central forum for follow-up to the Conference; no other body had the wherewithal to integrate the economic, social and environmental pillars of the international agenda. The Council was also well positioned to offer visionary thinking with regard to the post-2015 development framework, focusing on outcomes and delivery while retaining the best aspects of the MDGs, such as simplicity and time-bound targets.

23. Given its legitimacy, complementarity with other intergovernmental bodies and system-wide reach, the Council clearly had the potential to effect change in global governance. Constructive dialogue with the Group of 20 could help it to fulfil its potential to help ensure the economic and social well-being of all.

24. The Council should continue to assess the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 and focus on improving its cooperation with expert bodies in order to make better use of their valuable expertise. In the current turbulent economic climate, it was also important to strengthen ties with the Bretton Woods institutions and to cooperate with the private sector and civil society.

25. The Council had an indisputable comparative advantage in the system-wide effort to adopt an integrated approach to peace and development. As President, he would endeavour to further strengthen the Council's cooperation with the Peacebuilding Commission and the Security Council, and to seek common ground and a maximum convergence of positions.

Election of the Bureau

26. **The President** said that rule 18 of its rules of procedure provided for the Council to elect four Vice-Presidents. The nomination from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States would be taken up at a later date as the Group required more time to submit its proposal. He therefore took it that the Council wished to elect the candidates nominated by the other three regional groups.

27. *Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt), Mr. Percaya (Indonesia) and Mr. de Laiglesia (Spain) were elected Vice-Presidents of the Council for 2012 by acclamation.*

28. **Ms. Ogwu** (Nigeria) said that the Council had raised its relevance in 2011 and had contributed to the work of the United Nations, most notably through the adoption of a ministerial declaration on education. Council resolutions had also drawn attention to the issue of public administration and development and to the challenges faced by small island developing States. In its review of the implementation of its resolution 61/16, the General Assembly had recommended the continuance of the Council's annual meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Her delegation supported the decision to hold an annual high-level policy dialogue with international financial and trade institutions within the framework of a strengthened high-level segment of the annual substantive session of the Council and saw the merit of holding a discussion on an economic, social or related theme to be determined by the Council and informed by a report of the Secretary-General.

29. Lastly, the Council should strive to highlight and encourage the involvement of States' ministers of finance and other relevant ministries in its deliberations with a view to strengthening its engagement with the Bretton Woods institutions, WTO and UNCTAD.

Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters (E/2012/1 and E/2012/2)

30. **The President** recalled that in its resolutions 1988/77 and 1989/114, and in its decision 2006/206, the Council had decided to adopt certain measures to revitalize and improve its functioning. The General Assembly, in its resolutions 45/264, 48/162, 50/227, 52/12 B, 57/270 B and 61/16, had also taken important steps to restructure and revitalize the Council. On the basis of those guidelines, the Council would have before it for consideration at its organizational session the annotated provisional agenda (E/2012/2) and the proposed basic programme of work for the Council for 2012 and 2013 (E/2012/1).

31. In conformity with the provisions of paragraph 2 (l) of Council resolution 1988/77, informal consultations would be held on the proposed basic programme of work and on the other matters requiring action by the Council at the organizational session.

32. Turning to the question of seating arrangements for delegations, he proposed that, as in the past, lots should be drawn to determine which delegation would occupy the first seat.

33. *The delegation of Nigeria was selected by the drawing of lots to take the first seat.*

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.